

Out & about

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Zürich's main terminus.

The third day was also spent on the main line with a return trip from Zürich to Baden where other main line steam stock in the custody of VDZ is kept. A lot of valuable operating experience was gained managing No. 31's boiler on this day with running at maximum authorised speed for extended periods proving interesting. The relaxed but professional attitude of the Swiss railways staff to a 107-year-old wood-bodied, four-wheel steam railcar with a maximum service speed of 45kph, mixing it under the wires with TGVs, ICEs and double-deck commuter trains was a refreshing experience. Flexibility was the order of the day with only a phone call to control required to revise the programme and retime and repath our progress back to Zürich during the afternoon rush hour so that we could organise a celebratory meal at a reasonable time in the evening. It reminded me of how things used to be in the UK. We were overwhelmed by the hospitality and time given by the Swiss team, along with their commitment to providing a professional service and instruction.



The four GWS members pose with their Swiss compatriots, the visitors being 1st 2nd 4th & 5th from the left.



A Sunny Day at Luzern HBf. PHOTO: David Carter.

Peter and Rosemary Newton have a grand day out.

Having travelled to Switzerland on several times in the last 25 years to enjoy holidays focussing on rail travel, walking and bird watching, the use of the Swiss Pass has proved immensely valuable in giving maximum enjoyment of these objectives through the flexibility it allows.

On one occasion we decided to visit a bird reserve near Laupen from our base at Interlaken, travelling via Thun, Belp and Bern and taking refreshments with us, as we intended to spend the best part of the day there. The reserve at Auried, on the west bank of the River Saane, was 1.5 miles from Laupen, and by the time we had covered this, walked round the Reserve and eaten our lunch, it had become unbearably hot – certainly too hot for us. Having trudged back to Laupen we made a snap decision to spend the rest of the day making further use of our Swiss Pass, taking a train to Berne, then on to Luzern via Zofingen. As usual we had our Kursbuch with us.

As we walked out of Luzern station, with no real plan, we simply followed others who were heading to a boat, the *Berner Oberland*, and decided to join them. What better way to spend a hot afternoon! Consulting the Kursbuch whilst on the boat, we ascertained that we could sail as far as Vitznau and have dinner there, before heading back. Disembarking at Luzern there was just time for a brisk walk down towards the Kapellbrücke to see and hear the alpine swifts which nest in the water tower there, before travelling back via the Emmental line

to Konolfingen and thence to Thun and Interlaken. Arriving back at the hotel at 00.15am it was our chance to see if the hotel key worked! It did.

Having set out just to do some bird watching we had used six trains, two boats and covered a sizeable chunk of Switzerland with an ease only achieved with the Swiss Pass and the estimable national timetable that allowed last minute changes of plan to be made – impossible to do in this country.



Just some of the many trees that line the track in the gorge between Thusis & Solis.

PHOTO: Bremgarten.

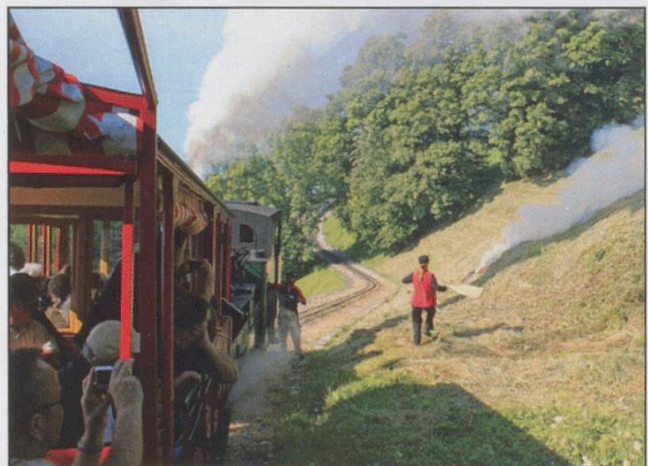
Peter Dixon encounters Swiss efficiency...

Leaving Reichenau on the Davos portion of the Glacier Express on a bright sunny evening last July there were a couple of sudden rain showers, then half way between Thusis and Solis the train came to a stand. The conductor descended from the train and went to confer with the driver. On his return he informed us that a tree had been struck by lightning and was foul of the track and assistance was on its way. About 20-minutes later a diesel tug arrived and hauled the train back to Thusis where two Post buses were already waiting to ferry the passengers on to Tiefencastel. It soon became apparent that another bus was required and the official only had to raise his arm and another bus drove out of the garage. As we were departing I noted that the diesel tug had been loaded with chainsaws and other tools required to clear the obstruction. On arrival at Tiefencastel a Chur bound train had been reversed and its

passengers were waiting to board the buses back to Thusis. The total delay was about 1 hour. Swiss efficiency - although I suspect that it could have been longer if the incident had occurred elsewhere.

...then he meets an Italian car driver.

In August I was travelling in the rear coach of a Tirano to St Moritz service. After the train left the stop at Le Prese, I noted the usual line of motor vehicles following along the road. The car which was immediately behind the train was following so close to the rear of our train that its driver clearly did not see the road markings where the track leaves the road at the north end of the village. He got a nasty surprise when he ended up bouncing around on the sleepers. The car was a 4x4 with Italian plates and did not become grounded, although I suspect that his front wheel tracking may have been affected. Having rejoined the road he was then observed driving past the train at speed and almost "lost it" again at a left hand bend. He was last seen at the rear of the queue at the barriers protecting the "pinch" at San Antonio. Certainly a case of more haste less speed!



The train crew put out the grass fire started by a BRB train.

PHOTO: Peter Arnold.

Peter and Mary Arnold make some connections.

Last summer we discovered that events can work in one's favour - sometimes most unexpectedly.

One day we travelled by train to Montreux, arriving at 10.53 with the idea of

making our first ever trip up to Rochers de Naye knowing the next departure was not until 11.46. We strolled to the ticket office, purchased our tickets and wandered back to Platform 8 where there was a carriage immediately opposite the top of the stairs. Opening the nearest compartment door we climbed aboard, a conductor quickly appeared, checked our tickets and our train departed. We then realised that this was no ordinary train. The varnished wooden interior of our curtained open bogie carriage had obviously been lovingly restored, and if the carriage was old so was the 4-wheeled electric loco propelling it. We later discovering that it was HGe 2/2 No.2 built by SLM in 1909 for the Montreux-Glion Bahn. Quite by chance, we had boarded the "Belle Epoque" train, due to depart at 10.46, but which had not left until almost 11.00! This train only runs in good weather and follows the regular 10.46 train but at a more leisurely pace. Upon reaching the summit at 12.08 the train crew have time for a lunch break before doing a trip down to Caux and back. We travelled back down on the return working to Montreux at 15.20 having enjoyed some reasonable views from the summit. An unexpected connection.

Later in the holiday, having moved on to Kandersteg, we decided upon a "pilgrimage" to our favourite mountain, and our favourite railway – the Brienz Rothorn. The weather could not have been better and I had worked out that by leaving Kandersteg on the 08.12 train, changing at Spiez, we would have either a 5 or 36 minutes connection at Interlaken Ost to reach Brienz in time for the 10.45 BRB train. As our ICE train from Spiez was a few minutes late I did not expect to make the shorter connection at Interlaken Ost. However, that train also was late departing so after a mad dash between platforms (typical for passengers connecting at Interlaken Ost!) we reached Brienz just before 10.00, finding ourselves to be third and fourth at the turnstile for the 10.45 train with some 40 minutes to wait.

The loop track contained 2 sets of carriages, but there was no sign of a loco. Then we realised that BRB No.1 (of 1892)

was standing behind the station building at the bottom end of the platform track with its two vintage carriages. A few more minutes passed and things began to happen! First No.7 (of 1936) came off shed and went to coal up before collecting a set from the carriage shed. Meanwhile No.14 (of 1996) came off shed, collected one set from the loop road and disappeared back to the shed sidings whilst No.12 (of 1992) then followed and remained with the other set in the loop road. Soon No.7 came down into the platform with its two 1930's carriages, followed by No.14 with its set. And so the scene was set for the 10.45 departure – three trains led by No.14, then No.7 and finally No.1 and its old coaches. Due to our good connections resulting in us being at the front of the queue we were able to obtain seats in the open 4-wheel carriage at the front of the vintage train, something we had never managed before. And so we departed, with No.12 staying in the loop, together with No.16 (of 1992) which by now had come in with the 10.35 arrival from the summit. From our vantage point the sound of No.1 climbing through the woods to Geldreid loop was delightful, and we also had a grandstand view of our train's conductress and driver (with lighted cigar!) beating out a lineside grass fire.

Having reached the top and admired the view we chose to travel down to Planalp for refreshments at the little restaurant there that is always quieter than the summit hotel. This can be a risky move on a busy day as getting an onward train down from here may entail a long wait due to the trains from the top being full. This was our bad connection as we had to wait for more than an hour. In conclusion we understand that the BRB policy for their older locos is to use Nos.1, 2 & 5 on a three yearly cycle and nos.6 & 7 in alternate years. As Nos.3 & 4 require extensive work they will be out of service for the foreseeable future. We were incredibly lucky both with the superb weather and to see nos.1 & 7 working together, and I did wonder whether No.15 was out of traffic for repairs or planned maintenance.